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SUBJECT: EU'S POLICY TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA: DAS
BARKS-RUGGLES' VISIT TO BERLIN

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[1](#)B. BERLIN 00168

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SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Deputy Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Erica Barks-Ruggles met on January 17-19 with democracy and human rights officials in the German MFA and Chancellery. Among other topics, Barks-Ruggles and German interlocutors discussed the Germans' plans to lead the development of a coherent EU strategy on Central Asia during its presidency. The Germans are in agreement with the USG on most key policy points, and said that the EU strategy for Central Asia will be more fully developed at a meeting of EU Troika foreign ministers with Central Asian foreign ministers in Astana on March 28. German officials confirmed that the EU will also make a decision about sanctions against Uzbekistan in March - possibly just before the Astana meeting. End summary.

EU STRATEGY ON CENTRAL ASIA: LOOKING REALISTICALLY AHEAD

[1](#)2. (C) In a meeting with Hans-Dieter Lucas, MFA Director General for Russia, Caucasus and Central Asia, Lucas expressed cautious optimism on promoting a human rights agenda in Central Asia, opining that focusing on rule of law was a more effective strategy in the region than heavily promoting democratization. Lucas said the debate on the EU's efforts to formulate a common strategy toward Central Asia is timely, stressing that Germany's goal is to increase presence, money, and attention directed toward the region. Germany, he said, is the only EU country with diplomatic missions in all five central Asian countries. Barks-Ruggles stressed the need for attention to democracy and human rights issues as central to good governance and the rule of law, and hoped these would be prominent in the EU's strategy.

[1](#)3. (C) Norman Walter, the Chancellery's Office Director for Central, Eastern and Southern Europe, Central Asia and Transcaucases, complemented these comments, saying that the "three pillars" for Central Asia are stability, regional

cooperation, and human rights. Walter said that the process for developing an EU strategy on Central Asia is "going in the right direction" and that a final draft of the strategy document should be ready after the planned meeting in Astana in March. According to Walter, the target date for launching a formal EU strategy is the end of the German presidency. Both Walter and Lucas agreed that human rights, in addition to energy and foreign investment, will be of central importance to the EU's strategy in this region.

TURKMENISTAN

14. (C) Both Norman Walter and Hans-Dieter Lucas discussed prospects for Turkmenistan following the death of President Saparmurad Niyazov in late December. Both shared the view that democracy will not come overnight, but said there is room for some positive developments in Turkmenistan. Lucas noted that the Turkmen government has allowed the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) to send a mission from its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR). He also said that while there have been some cracks in leadership there, one should not expect major changes from Niyazov-style leadership in the short-term. Walter predicted bigger changes in the longer term, but questioned what sort they might be, saying that Turkmenistan is "really a black box for the Germans, and a big question mark." Both noted the need for improvement in human rights and increased civic and citizen participation in governance) and said Germany would look closely at these issues.

UZBEKISTAN

15. (C) The Germans to whom DAS Barks-Ruggles spoke were

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clearly thinking about the upcoming March review of EU sanctions against Uzbekistan. Barks-Ruggles noted that Uzbekistan's promise to engage in a Human Rights Dialogue, while positive, is in itself insufficient to merit lifting sanctions. She urged the Europeans to look at what concrete actions had been taken by the Uzbeks in making a decision on sanctions. Easing sanctions before any action will send the wrong message both to Uzbekistan and others in the region. The Germans confirmed there has been no firm date set for the proposed EU-Uzbek human rights dialogue, and noted it was unlikely to take place before the March decision point.

16. (C) Hans-Dieter Lucas said that following Steinmeier's visit to Uzbekistan in early November, there were signs that the Uzbeks are ready to improve relations with the EU and may be willing to make progress on the Andijon case. However, he also said that the Uzbeks are unlikely to undertake a full or independent investigation of the Andijon case and that a planned round of talks between the EU and Uzbekistan on this "may be the closest to a full investigation we get." He also stated that there has been improved access for the ICRC into Uzbek prisons.

KAZAKHSTAN AND THE OSCE

17. (C) In discussions about Kazakhstan's bid to chair the OSCE, the Germans saw both possibilities and drawbacks. The Germans agreed that certain benchmarks for progress must be set down. Hans-Dieter Lucas noted that it would be difficult to support Kazakhstan's bid if there is no improvement on the human rights front, and worried that this issue risks causing a split in the OSCE if the Central Asian members do not have a chance to lead the organization. Norman Walter touched this same point more softly, saying that "this organization might fall apart", as there was "destructive energy" from

Russia toward this end. Walter also said there is currently no concerted line from the EU on Kazakhstan, and worried that pushing fractious issues such as Kazakhstan's bid at this point in time would exacerbate other, unrelated EU divisions, namely those concerning the EU Constitution. Barks-Ruggles said that having a Central Asian OSCE chair purely for the sake of symbolism is ineffective, and that like any chair, a Central Asian chair should be committed to OSCE values.

KYRGYZSTAN

18. (C) On Kyrgyzstan, Barks-Ruggles and German interlocutors agreed that the issue there is one of stabilizing and assisting positive development of institutions. Hans-Dieter Lucas said that democracy is relatively dynamic there in comparison to the rest of the region, although he noted some concerns about ongoing corruption, clans, and organized crime. Norman Walter said that President Askar Akayev has requested meetings with German Chancellor Angela Merkel but has thus far been denied a state visit. According to Walter, the MFA gave him the impression that a state visit might be possible given recent progress on the Kyrgyz Constitution, but Walter himself was more skeptical about this 'progress'. Walter said that a state visit during the German presidency of the EU was "out of the question".

LOOKING AHEAD

19. (U) The Germans' focus for Central Asia is now on the March 28 meeting of foreign ministers in Astana. Germany, as EU president, will host the meeting. The meeting is expected to last one-half to three-quarters of a day, and although it will not be a formal drafting session for the EU's strategy on Central Asia, it is intended to be the final step of developing this strategy before the end of the German presidency.

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